2: Flannery E-5 (1940-1948) 1953
NQ13 Gros Ventre NQ13

INTRODUCTION

The Algonquian-speaking Gros Ventres live on the Fort Belknap Reservation in North Central Montana. The Reservation is a small part of the land claimed by this tribe in 1887, when the boundaries were finally fixed. At present, the Gros Ventres number between a thousand and eleven hundred, and they share their territory with almost as many Assiniboine. The latter tribe was included in the settlement of the Reservation although it did not participate with the Gros Ventres and Blackfoot tribes in the Treaty of 1855. In spite of some intermarriage, the two groups have never really blended and the Gros Ventres tend to center at the village of Hays at the southern part of the Reservation while the Assinboine are clustered around Lodge Pole, a settlement some ten miles east of Hays. The Indian Agency is approximately forty miles north of Hays at the northern boundary of the Reservation and close to the town of Harlem on the Great Northern Railroad. Of importance to the Gros Ventres, who are predominantly Roman Catholic, is St. Paul's Mission and School which lie at the foot of the Little Rockies only a mile south of Hays. David Rodnick has given an excellent description of the geographical setting of the Reservation for his study of modern conditions and of acculturation among the Fort Belknap Assiniboine.

Of the several tribes in the Northern Plains region, the Gros Ventres are perhaps the least known. Although they maintained intact their tribal identity, and were recognized as fierce warriors, they were often mistakenly identified with the Blackfoot tribes, with whom they were frequently allied. Moreover, little was known of the Gros Ventre language except that it was an exceedingly difficult one; practically every independent observer during the nineteenth century remarks on this fact. Since, however, many Gros Ventre men knew Blackfoot, the linguistic difference was often overlooked and the Gros Ventres tended to be counted as one of the Blackfoot tribes. As part of the so-called "Blackfoot Nation," leaders of the Gros Ventres signed the Treaty of 1855.

[P. viii contains no text]

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over the area. The Gros Ventres had the benefit of buffalo hunting a trifle longer than the other groups. All the buffalo in Montana were in February, 1882, in their territory, between the Milk River and the Bear Paw Mountains. The hunting season, of October 1882 to February 1883, finished the annihilation of the great northern herd and left only stragglers, merely a few thousands.[70] By August, 1883, both the Blackfoot and the Crow Agencies reported that all game was gone from their respective reservations, and a letter from the Fort Belknap Agency stated that game there "was practically exhausted."[71] In 1884 the Blackfoot and Crow agencies reported that the buffalo was extinct.[72] After ceding more land, in 1888 the limits of the Fort Belknap Reservation, which the Gros Ventres share with the Assiniboine, were finally fixed.[73]

Missionary endeavors, carried on by the Jesuit Fathers, had begun in earnest only in 1885. Prior to that time contact with missionaries had been sporadic. Father Point in 1846–47 had been well received and sent in a good report of this tribe. When Father Giorda attempted to go among them in 1862, however, Bull Lodge took him prisoner and stripped him of his possessions. Since his captivity did not last longer than a few weeks, and his property was restored to him, several months later he made another attempt. This time, while there was some opposition at first, he was permitted to baptize over a hundred children. Subsequently Fathers Rappagliosi and Grassi made several visits respectively, and at considerable intervals. Finally, after some preliminary negotiations, Father Ebershweiler established permanent residence in 1885, and the school at St. Paul's was opened in 1887. The mission and school flourished. In 1891 the founder was replaced by Father Flusi, assisted by Father Sansome.[74]

The Gros Ventres population—always small, relative to that of surrounding tribes—was steadily declining. Hayden's estimate of 1853 placed the total at 2520.[75] In 1883, at the time of the

[70] Hornaday, pp. 492, 506, 510–11.
[71] Report of Commissioner of Indian Affairs 1883–1915, pp. lx, 98.
[72] *Ibid.*, pp. 107, 109.
[73] *Ibid.*, p. 295.
[74] Palladino, pp. 187, 195–96, 230, 232, 235.
[75] Hayden, p. 344. Gros Ventres today claim their number was then 10,000.

PLATES

142 The original photograph of Plate 1 was taken in 1887 and
291 belongs to The Boy. Shown in it are Lame Bull, The Boy's
301 father, and Crow Bull, maternal uncle of Coming Daylight. Both
302 of these men were born around 1825 and their personal experiences were often referred to by our informants as we took down the record of the old way of life. Each had been Keeper of the sacred Flat Pipe.

115 The photographs composing Plate 2, except for the one of The
133 Boy, were taken in 1940 by Dr. Karl F. Herzfeld. The first three
142 show the nature of the country around Hays on the Fort Belknap
291 Reservation; the other three show some of our informants and
292 interpreters whose biographical sketches follow.

531 In Plate 3, the shield and war medicines of Bull Lodge, father
797 of our informant, Garter Snake, represent only a few of the specimens of Gros Ventre culture collected in 1937 by Mr.
778 Richard Pohrt, of Flint, Michigan.
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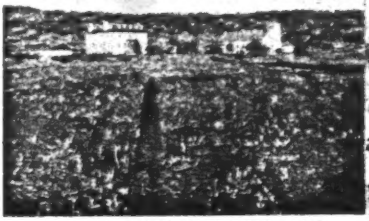
IN THE LITTLE ROCKIES

THE BOY

PLAINS NEAR HAYS

MARY, SINGER, AND COMING DAYLIGHT

[342]
[1797]



ST. PAUL'S MISSION AND SCHOOL

COMING DAYLIGHT'S TIPI

PLATE II

[p. 912 (B)]

3: Cooper E-5 (1938-1940) 1957
NQ13 Gros Ventre NQ13

analysis was given by our informants with a good deal of hesitation. The form of direct address, Ni:nänä'än, was not used at the sacred pipe rites nor in trivial matters, but in grave emergencies, —in very solemn oaths or vows, extreme danger in battle, critical illness,—which concern the life or welfare of human beings.

The fourth form of address used for the Supreme Being was Iθɔna'an "our (inclusive) father."[4] This name was in use as far back as our oldest informants, Coming Daylight and Singer, could remember. The Gros Ventres are quite aware that their close linguistic and cultural kin, the Arapaho, use the name "father" for the Supreme Being. The Gros Ventres, however, unlike the Arapaho, never call him "grandfather."

Finally, the Supreme Being is also spoken of as initci:t nihɔne:-hɔnixtĕ (life, he owns) "owner, or master of life," a common expression to or of the Supreme Being among other Algonquian-speaking peoples.[5]

The Supreme Being, unlike the culture-hero, had no wife or children. He does not figure at all in the Gros Ventre folklore, nor even in the origin myths to be given later, except insofar as the culture-hero taught the people to worship him. The Supreme Being's appearance was completely unknown; the culture hero who taught the people to pray to him did not describe how he looked; and in all the folklore and sacred stories of the Gros Ventres there is no record of the Supreme Being having a body or taking material form or appearing in dream or vision in material form. As The Boy put it: "If anyone had ever seen the Supreme Being, he would have described how he looked, and this story would have been handed down as the biggest one in all the Gros Ventre tales."

The nearest to such is a story regarding the first Catholic priest[6] who came to the Gros Ventres when The Boy's father, Lame Bull (born 1824) was a young man old enough to remember the event well. At first the Gros Ventres said: "The Supreme Being has come down from above. He is the priest." The Supreme Being

[4] Cf. Kroeber, 1908, p. 275.
[5] Cf. Cooper, 1934, p. 71.
[6] Cf. Flannery, 1953, p. 20.

3: Cooper E-5 (1938-1940) 1957
NQ13 Gros Ventre NQ13

was supposed to have come on earth far up north, and to have made the rounds of all the tribes, finally reaching the Gros Ventres. The Gros Ventres at first so called the priest, but when they discovered that he ate and slept like themselves, they ceased calling him by this name.

In the sweatlodge rite, to be described later, the first of those invited to sweat was the Supreme Being.[1] In how far such an invitation was anthropomorphically conceived is hard to say; it need not, of course, necessarily have implied anything beyond symbolic deference.

The Boy and Thick stated: "He is not a 'false person.' He is entirely in a class by himself. We think so much of him that we do not dare to try to learn what he looks like. We class him as a kind of shadow. He is the most wonderful and powerful of all beings who have no bodies."

No statues or images or pictographs of any kind were ever made of the Supreme Being, nor were there any symbolic representations of him.

The Supreme Being was alone and one, and, as compared with other sacred or superhuman beings of religion, myth, and folklore, he ranked first. Where prayers included invocation of more beings than one, the Supreme Being's name always came first; in ritual invitations before sweating or partaking of food, he was always invited first. He was, however, much more than *primus inter pares*. He was in a class by himself as not only the most powerful but as the ultimate source of the power possessed by other beings and as the ultimate ruler and controller of these others. Bha'a, the Storm Being, who ranked next in importance to the Supreme Being, was controller of storms, thunder and lightning, and exercised a certain limited autonomy. He had this power and office, however, not of himself, but by delegation from the Supreme Being, and exercised it as the agent of the Supreme Being, as will be explained more fully later. Then, too, while the Gros Ventres through fasting and crying on the hills or prairie sought supernatural power, not directly from the Supreme Being, but from other beings—animals and others—it was the Supreme Being who

[1] Cf. Kroeber, 1908, p. 275.

3: Cooper E-5 (1938-1940) 1957
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reward and punishment for such human behavior exclusively or almost exclusively in this life. At death the souls of all except murderers went to the same spirit habitat, not to the Supreme Being.[13]

The extensive cultural and ethico-social activities of man towards the Supreme Being will form the subject of succeeding chapters. We may merely state here that the Supreme Being easily held the first place in cult, as compared with other beings, and that he bulked large in the Gros Ventre ethico-social conscience.

That the foregoing concept of the Supreme Being was aboriginal with the Gros Ventres and not the result of borrowing from white sources seems clear beyond reasonable doubt from both the external and internal evidence.

First the external evidence. While the Gros Ventres have been known in our literature since 1751, their contacts with the whites before the middle of the last century were relatively slight. They met traders and trappers and an occasional intermarriage with whites occurred, but active missionary work among the Gros Ventres did not begin until 1884.[14]

Of about twenty different informants from whom we gathered our account of the Gros Ventre Supreme Being concept, most were older people, men and women, between the ages of 60 and 90 (in 1938-40) and all of them were positive, from their own memory of pre-missionary days and/or from what they had always heard from their parents or grandparents or other elders, that the belief was part of ancient native tradition and not one derived from the whites or from missionaries. For instance, Bull Head, about 80 years old in 1940, then the oldest living Gros Ventre man, stated that he had known about the Supreme Being as far back as he could remember. Coming Daylight, then about 85, and of

[13] The older name for the abode of the dead was tsɔtci:tăn (etymology unknown to informants) but described as "toward the sunset." The more common name was ba:snabe (big sand) which was described as a place "to the north." The Milky Way was called Ghost Trail according to another tradition. No non-human supernatural being was conceived of as in charge of the future abode or as rewarder or punisher of the dead for earthly deeds.

[14] Cf. Flannery, 1953, p. 23.

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attended the Ghost Dance there, and had returned to Hays in that year. As introducer and leader of the cult he preached wa:hatcan (lit. "reunion of all together," cf. wahanichina "unite" [Sifton]), signifying the rising of the dead Indians either in the near future or at the end of the world, and predicted the return of the buffalo, and into his message wove something of both Christ and the Flat Pipe. Big gatherings of Gros Ventres listened to him. Some few became converts, but most remained spectators and hearers only and declined to join. Further, the Gros Ventres did not join at all in the Ghost Dance political uprising. They had previously given their word not to go to war with the whites. The movement lasted just two years and then died out."

The factors accounting for the resistance to and decline of the Ghost Dance among the Gros Ventres were, according to The Boy and Charles Buckman, the following. The older men and women did not believe Returns-to-war and the other promoters because "they had to be shown, and they felt that it was impossible for the dead, to rise again and for the buffalo to come back." The younger fellows, of the age of The Boy and Charles Buckman at the time, that is, around twenty years, did not believe because "the younger generation was then going to the Catholic missionaries and had learned different." Moreover, in 1893, some Wyoming Arapaho visited Hays and from them the Gros Ventres found that Returns-to-war had "exaggerated the story," so they all quit the Ghost Dance.

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From Cora Chandler, Coming Daylight and Al Chandler we gathered the following information that sheds additional light on the rise of the Gros Ventre Ghost Dance and especially on the causes believed to have led to its rejection and decline.

During the rites, there would be round dances; the dancers would be painted after which they would sing and sing; the songs

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" Mooney, 1896, p. 817 in his exhaustive study of the situation states that a Gros Ventre had been visiting in 1889 among the Arapaho and "heard the story and brought back the wonderful news to the Gros Ventres and Assiniboine of Fort Belknap, but although his account was received by some with unquestioning faith, the excitement had in it nothing of a dangerous character."

Dance (Sun Dance), for example, was given in that very year and, so far as our data go, but one Crazy Dance was held after that. The seasonal Flat Pipe rite was discontinued. Furthermore there was a breakdown in the socio-political life. The necessity for nomadic life had disappeared and as a consequence there was no longer need of policing the hunt or keeping order in the camp circle when the whole tribe gathered so that, with the further establishment of peace, the raison d'être for two rival soldier societies was gone.

In the transition period the missionaries were trying valiantly to fill the gap in religious life but did not offer a satisfactory solution for the social situation; nor did the Agency which had become the center of the new economic life. It was the Grass dance, which as we have seen survived in a somewhat changed form, that seems to have filled the void left in social life.

In its earlier form the Grass dance was purely social in nature, as was the Star dance, but the latter faded away while the former attained a position of heightened importance. One of the factors accounting for this fact seems to be that the Grass dance "had more to it," as our informants put it. The performance of the dog ritual was certainly far more spectacular than the simpler dance of the Star society and, in addition, it had semi-ceremonial connotations reminiscent of other features of the older Gros Ventre culture which were lacking from the Star dance. For example, the owners of the regalia in the Grass dance were likewise officers of several degrees of importance therein, as was the case in the performance of the Sacred Dances. Again, sex abstinence was required before dancing with the crow-belts as it was before participating in the Sacrifice Dance (Sun Dance) and before dancing with the Feathered Pipe. Ceremonial incensing of persons and equipment had been a marked characteristic of Gros Ventre religious life. The formal transfer of office and regalia duplicates the pattern of transfer of office of Pipe Keeper, transfer of painted lodges, and so on. Recounting of war deeds was frequently demanded in connection with many aspects of Gros Ventre life,—to validate the giving of a name, the erection of a